

SECRET

SOVIET REACTIONS TO US GULF INTERVENTION

If the US intervenes in the Gulf to protect oil and vulnerable Gulf states against Iranian attack, the immediate Soviet reaction is likely to be more of what they are already doing, i.e., trying to build a relationship with Tehran.

The Soviet see Iran as the prize of the Gulf. The USSR has diplomatic and trade relations with Iran, and lets its clients supply weapons.

In May and June, as a result of war difficulties and increased Soviet aid to Iraq, the Iranians took the initiative to go to Moscow for talks. Nothing much was accomplished, but it happened over Khomeini's initial reluctance. Ergo: some Ayatollas are willing to take a pragmatic line toward Moscow.

We have recent reporting that the Soviets see the current course of the Gulf war as opening real opportunities in Iran: Iraq is fully dependent; Iran needs advanced arms only the USSR can provide.

If US intervention leads to shooting between Iranian and US forces, the more intense the conflict, the more likely that the Soviets will make inroads in Tehran by offering weapons.

US air defensive air operations, basing of forces in the Gulf, and even air strikes at Iranian territory are not likely to trigger a Soviet military action. They would have no incentive to attack Iran, and couldn't do much against US forces at acceptable risk.

Support from US allies will not influence the Soviets much one way or another. It will mostly help with US public opinion.

Low-level Soviet spokesmen have made noises about the Soviets "intervening" in Iran under the 1921 Treaty (renounced by Iran) should the US actually invade Iran.

This is conceivable, but unlikely, unless the US invasion were massive -- assuming that's possible.

In sum: There is a Soviet threat to the Gulf. The most immediate threat is an Iranian drift into the Soviet orbit.

The US ought to be able to conduct an intervention which is defensive enough, and sufficiently circumscribed to keep from spooking the Iranians into Soviet arms.

Any US intervention ought to be accompanied by serious political efforts to get some sort of dialogue going with the Iranians, even if it worries the Arabs. There is no evidence that Iran wants a fight with the US. It respects a power that will act forcefully, but also take Iran's interests seriously. That's what the Soviets will trade on. We cannot let them be the only game in Tehran.

SECRET